



OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL AND ADULT EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
MARCH 2002

# KEY ISSUE BRIEF

A BRIEF ON VARIOUS TOPICS RELATED TO HIGH SCHOOLS,  
COMMUNITY COLLEGES, AND ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS.

## HIGH SCHOOL READING

### Facing the Issue: Low High School Reading Achievement

Even though there have been significant advances in our understanding of how children learn to read, there are still millions of high school youth who are reading at very low levels.

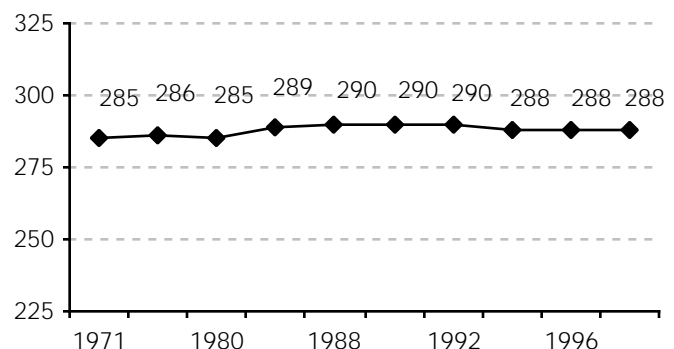
Due in part to poor skills, many students drop out of school, and many who graduate still do not possess sufficient reading skills for success in post-secondary education and the workplace. This problem is even more acute among poor and minority students.

Since 1971, no substantial progress has been made by 12th graders on NAEP reading assessments. In fact, since the late 1980s, average performance has dropped slightly.

### The Facts on High School Reading

- 23% of enrolled 17-year-olds read "below basic" levels, meaning they cannot search for information, understand informational passages, or extend ideas in texts. This equates to nearly 800,000 students reading at a very low level. And, this figure does not even capture reading levels for the estimated 1.4 million youth that drop out between 9th and 12th grade.<sup>1</sup>
- On average, black and Hispanic 12th graders read at the same level as white 8th graders.<sup>2</sup>
- A majority of incoming 9th graders in high poverty, urban schools read 2-3 years below grade-level.<sup>3</sup>
- 10% of college freshman take a remedial reading course.<sup>4</sup>
- 70% of unemployed Americans, aged 25 to 64, read at the two lowest literacy levels.<sup>5</sup>
- 50% of American manufacturing companies say their workers have deficits in reading and writing skills.<sup>6</sup>

### Average reading performance for 12th Graders: 1971-1999



Source: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP Reading Assessments.

## Laying the Groundwork

In 2000, the National Reading Panel released a report on key skills and methods central to reading achievement in grades K-3.<sup>7</sup> This report, mandated by Congress, has helped to inform important decisions about curriculum, instruction and assessment in elementary schools nationwide. It also provides a foundation from which to assess the unique instructional needs of adolescent readers and then set rigorous guidelines for evaluating research on high school reading models and literacy interventions.

## Reading in the High School Context

Building on the K-3 research components, many educators are taking their own initiative to incorporate the following strategies into their efforts to help high school students catch-up and master reading skills and comprehension:

- Extended learning time
- Teacher modeling of reading and thinking strategies
- Cooperative learning and text-based discussion
- Self-selected reading at students' ability-levels
- On-going progress monitoring.



### Taking Action: OVAE's Role in Preparing America's Future

To address the issue of low high school reading achievement, OVAE—in partnership with the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)—is hosting a workshop on high school reading instruction in May 2002. This workshop will be the second in a conference series intended to define knowledge-base on adolescent literacy and then establish large-scale research agenda. In 2003, OVAE, NICHD and other partners will jointly award research grants on high school reading.

## Key Components of Reading for Children (K-3):

- Phonemic awareness
- Phonics
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension

### Spotlight on Success: Strategic Reading

All ninth grade students attending Talent Development Model High Schools take a daily, 90-minute reading course designed to develop reading and fluency skills. Using daily mini-lessons on reading strategies, verbal modeling of reading and thinking skills, cooperative learning teams for text discussion, and extensive independent reading, this course assists students in gaining—on average—two years in reading ability for each year spent of instruction.

Model Developer: Center for the Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University

### Sources

- 1 US Department of Education, NCES. Quick Tables and Figures on 1998 NAEP Reading Assessment. Downloaded from <http://nces.ed.gov/quicktables>.
- 2 US Department of Education, NCES. NAEP 1999 Trends in Academic Progress: Three Decades of Student Performance. Downloaded from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>.
- 3 Johns Hopkins University. Strategic Reading. Presentation at the November 2001 Improving America's Schools Conference in Reno, NV.
- 4 US Department of Education, OERI. Answers in the Toolbox: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor's Degree Attainment. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1999.
- 5 US Department of Education, NCES. Dropout Rates in the United States. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2000.
- 6 National Manufacturing Association, Center for Workforce Success. The Skilled Workforce Shortage. Downloaded from <http://www.nam.org>.
- 7 National Institute for Literacy. Putting Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read, Kindergarten through Grade 3. Downloaded from <http://www.nifl.gov>.

### For Further Information

For issue briefs on other high school topics, as well as information on upcoming events under OVAE's Preparing America's Future Initiative, please visit <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/paf.html>.